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# WHO ARE THE UNITARIANS?

AUGUSTUS P. RECCORD

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# WHO ARE THE UNITARIANS?

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BY

AUGUSTUS P. RECCORD

Eight sermons delivered at the request of and published by the Board of Trustees of the First Unitarian Church of Detroit, Michigan.

THE BEACON PRESS
25 Beacon Street
BOSTON, - - - MASS.

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# PREFACE

The exclusion from the Interchurch World Movement of the Unitarian churches, in common with the Universalist, has prompted the question, "Who are these Unitarians? What is their origin and history and belief that they should not be permitted to participate in one of the most ambitious religious movements of today?" The admission that the exclusion was based upon policy rather than upon principle, upon expediency rather than upon conviction, has not lessened the popular interest in the above questions. The sermons included in this little volume are an attempt to give a partial answer. They were delivered at the request of the Board of Trustees of the First Unitarian Church of Detroit, Michigan, and are published by that same board, with the hope and expectation that they will be welcomed by thoughtful, broadminded people in all denominations. While it is impossible for

any one person, whether minister or layman, to commit the entire Unitarian fellowship, it is believed that these sermons express, with reasonable accuracy, the consensus of opinion among an increasing number of Unitarians.

AUGUSTUS P. RECCORD.

Detroit, Michigan,
May, 1920.

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**Where the spirit of the Lord is,
there is liberty.**

*2 Corinthians III, 17.*

# WHO ARE THE UNITARIANS?

## INTRODUCTION

### THE UNITARIAN MOVEMENT

AS an organized movement Unitarianism is of recent origin. As an attitude of mind toward the things of the spirit it is as old as Christianity itself. It commends itself to the thoughtful, not as a body of doctrine, but as a method of apprehending religious truth, the method of free and unfettered observation and reflection. Over the door of every Unitarian church might be inscribed the words of Isaiah, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

It is sometimes claimed that the church of the first two or three centuries was Unitarian. It was Unitarian only in the sense that it was not Trinitarian. The doctrine of the Trinity had not yet been formulated. Many of the teachings of the church were as

far removed from our conceptions of religious truth as from the strictest orthodoxy. The chief thing that we have in common with it is the right of private judgment in matters of belief or conduct. Gradually this right was wrested from the people by the steady encroachment of the growing Catholic church until not a vestige of it remained. For the devout believer, the decrees of the church usurped the place of both reason and conscience. The reformers of the sixteenth century threw off one yoke only to assume another. They emancipated themselves from bondage to the church but substituted for it an equally oppressive bondage to the letter of the Bible. Unitarians, throughout their history, have refused to recognize these or any other purely external authorities in morals or religion. They have asked, with Jesus, "Why, even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right?" And so whoever, throughout the ages, has dared to raise his voice in protest against the authority of a divinely instituted church or a divinely inspired book and in the interest of the di-

vinely given reason and conscience, may be regarded as the spiritual forerunner of the Unitarian movement.

It was not until a century ago that this movement took definite form here in America. At the beginning of the century which brought the Pilgrim Fathers to Plymouth, English Unitarianism was confined to certain individual thinkers who were hated and persecuted by Catholic and Protestant alike. One could hardly expect to find many traces of Unitarian thought among the founders of New England and yet, in spite of their rigid Calvinism, they brought with them the germs, at least, of a larger and more humane theology. They craved simplicity, and this led them to omit all creed tests from their church covenants. They loved liberty, religious as well as political, and while they acknowledged their dependence upon the Bible, they insisted upon their right to use their reason in its interpretation. It has been well said that "In the broad and prophetic spirit of John Robinson, in the intense love of liberty of Sir Harry Vane, in

the sturdy sense and rational judgments of John Winthrop, . . . in the fidelity to toleration of Roger Williams and his keen insight into the meaning of soul liberty, what is now called Unitarianism had its beginnings."

Two events hastened the birth of American Unitarianism as an organized movement. One was the adoption of the half-way covenant; the other was the Great Awakening. Previous to 1662 only church members were allowed to vote in civil affairs. This meant the disfranchisement of five-sixths of the people and provoked bitter complaint. The half-way covenant was an attempt to allay the discontent of the disfranchised. It sought to counteract the growing disinclination to become members of the church by making the conditions easier. It set aside the idea of a converted membership and admitted all who had been baptized in infancy, were of good moral character and did not openly deny the teachings of the church. Such membership conveyed the right to vote in affairs of state but not in affairs of the church. The result was the admission of

many who had not experienced conversion and had little sympathy with the doctrinal position of the church. The presence of these half-way members was viewed with suspicion. It seemed to cast discredit upon the essential character of conversion. In 1735 Jonathan Edwards, then minister of the Northampton church, inaugurated a revival. Later his efforts were reënforced by the arrival of the English evangelist, Whitefield. The churches were aroused from their lethargy, the half-way covenant was abolished, and a converted church membership restored.

The Unitarians of today are the spiritual descendants of those who refused to be "awakened." At first they were not known by this name. They constituted the liberal wing of the Congregationalist body. The situation was not unlike that in the Congregationalist church today. Had the same spirit of toleration prevailed then that prevails today there would have been no division. If the same spirit of intolerance prevailed today there would be another break.

Tolerance, however, was not characteristic of that day. The conservative ministers precipitated the crisis by refusing to exchange pulpits with their more liberal brethren. In 1805 they were filled with consternation by the appointment of Henry Ware, a man of Unitarian convictions, to the Hollis professorship at Harvard College. This made him the moral and religious instructor of the student body and demonstrated that the college was in the hands of the representatives of the new faith. Andover Seminary was founded at once to counteract the growing tendency toward liberalism. One hundred years later, almost to a day, this Seminary was moved to Cambridge and affiliated with the Harvard Divinity School as coördinate parts of the University.

At first the liberal leaders met this outbreak of fanatical opposition with silence. They were disinclined to controversy and dreaded a division in the Congregational body. But as the breach between the two wings became wider and the relations between them more strained they were forced

to the conclusion that such a division was inevitable. Disfellowshipped by their brother ministers and denounced from the more conservative pulpits, they felt constrained to speak. They found a spokesman in William Ellery Channing, then minister of the Federal Street church in Boston. In 1819 he was invited to preach the sermon at the ordination of Jared Sparks, in Baltimore. Taking as his subject "Unitarian Christianity," he contended for a rational interpretation of the Bible as a human document, written by men and for men, and subject to the ordinary methods of interpretation. He then stated the views to which such an interpretation must inevitably lead, the unity and moral perfection of God, the humanity and spiritual leadership of Jesus and the dignity and worth of human nature. Ultimately these came to be known as the three great affirmations of Channing Unitarianism.

The die was cast. Henceforth there could be no concealment or evasion. Lines were sharply drawn and ministers and churches were compelled to take sides. As one

church after another issued its declaration of faith, it was found that more than one hundred and twenty-five New England churches, among them the oldest and strongest, had declared for the new faith. A glance at the Unitarian Year Book will reveal the fact that the old first churches of Plymouth, Boston, Cambridge, Dorchester, Roxbury, Concord, Lexington, Salem and twenty-six other Massachusetts communities, all founded in the seventeenth century, are now Unitarian. The Berry Street Conference of Ministers was formed in 1820, and the *Christian Register* founded in 1821. There organization lingered. The adherents of the new faith shrank from the thought of founding another denomination. They preferred to think of themselves as an "unsectarian sect," hesitated to take the Unitarian name, and regarded themselves as the representatives of a religious movement rather than a religious body. But there can be no movement unless there is something to move. Organization does not mean necessarily stagnation and inertia. And so in 1825 the American

Unitarian Association was formed and organized Unitarianism was born.

The Association's initial task was one of the most difficult and perplexing that any group of religionists ever faced. It was that of organizing liberty so as to make it effective. Otherwise the churches of the new order were destined to remain but little more than a group of "jostling independencies." The task is not yet complete. For convenience we can divide the first century of the denominational history into three periods. The first was one of affirmation and denial, affirmation of the new faith and denial of the old. It was dominated by William Ellery Channing. Once grant his three great affirmations and then demand that all theological doctrines and religious beliefs be thrown into the arena and judged by their conformity to these great principles, and, no matter how tenaciously the old dogmas cling to their places, the door is thrown wide open for a religion purified from superstition and undefiled by dogma. It was Channing's mission to open this door.

The second period was one of emancipation. It was dominated by Theodore Parker and Ralph Waldo Emerson. There are still those who pride themselves upon being Channing Unitarians, who believe as Channing did a century ago, not as he would believe if he were here today. The same type existed then. From the beginning the new faith tended to become stereotyped. It began to acquire that rigidity of form against which Channing uttered his warning and which he characterized as "Unitarian Orthodoxy." Parker and Emerson, each in his own way, stripped off the shell which was gradually encasing the new faith and destroyed the last vestige of the old supernaturalism. They freed religion from its accidental character and grounded it in the moral and spiritual nature of man. Emerson sounded the key note of the impending change in his Divinity School Address, delivered in 1838. Three years later Parker's "Transient and Permanent in Christianity" heralded the coming of the church universal:

"Whose temple shall be all space;
Whose shrine shall be the heart;
Whose creed shall be the truth;
Whose ritual shall be works of love and usefulness;
Whose profession of faith shall be divine life;
Whose constant aspiration shall be to be perfect as
God is perfect."

Today we are glad to claim these men as among the richest fruits of the liberal faith, and yet we find a striking commentary upon the Unitarianism of that day in Dr. Everett's pathetic statement that "of the two men who were to do more than any others to shape its future history, one turned his back upon Unitarianism and upon the other Unitarianism turned its back." Today both of these names are included in our Unitarian hall of fame.

The third period has been one of reconstruction and readjustment. Its watchword has been organization for efficiency. It has been dominated by no one or two men. It has been the result of a common spirit and purpose gradually taking possession of the whole body. Channing and his successors

fought the battle of intellectual freedom. Emerson and Parker compelled a recognition of the supreme authority of truth. Their successors realized, as one of their number expressed it, that what the world really needs "is not merely truth and freedom but truth, freedom and usefulness." And so it has been upon usefulness, serviceableness, devotion to the common weal, that the churches of this latter period have placed the chief emphasis. The immediate result has been a pronounced impetus toward church extension. Of the three hundred and forty-four churches founded during the last century, two hundred and thirty-one were organized during the last forty years of it. These are all free churches, made up of "the Lord's free people." In common with all others of the Unitarian faith they recognize no external authority in belief or morals. Every church is free to formulate its own belief and to determine its own practice and it grants the same freedom to each individual member. And yet, through their efforts for a more positive and constructive faith, a more

effective organization and a larger recognition of the responsibilities of freedom, there has been achieved, by these free churches of America, a unity of belief and a unanimity of purpose which are without parallel in any of the churches which have relied upon the constraint of theological creeds or ecclesiastical forms.

Abraham Lincoln, when asked why he had never joined a church, replied: "Because I have found difficulty in giving my assent, without mental reservations, to the long and complicated statements of Christian doctrine which characterize their articles of belief and confessions of faith. When any church will inscribe over its altars, as its sole qualification for membership, the Saviour's condensed statement of the substance of both law and gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,' that church will I join with all my heart and all my soul." This is substantially the position of our Unitarian churches today. We accept the religion of Jesus as summed

up in love to God and man, and welcome to our fellowship all who are in sympathy with our purpose and practical aims. Never were we so united in spirit and purpose; never so efficiently organized for practical Christian work; never so assured that whatever may be the name of the future religion of America, it will be essentially Unitarian in spirit and purpose. The only church for a free people is a free church. The only religion for a democratic people is a democratic religion.

**Have we not all one Father?**
**Hath not one God created us?**
*Malachi II, 10.*

**To us there is one God, the Father,**
**of whom are all things and we unto Him.**
*1 Corinthians VIII, 6.*

## GOD

THE problem of the centuries has been how to secure an adequate conception of God. Primitive religion was based upon the assumption of a localized deity. Present day religion depends for its very life upon the thought of God as everywhere present and everywhere operative in the world that he has made. These two conceptions differ by almost the whole diameter of being. The transition from one to the other has been made with great difficulty and to many it has seemed to involve the complete overthrow of the foundations upon which all religion rests.

The poets are often our best theologians. They apprehend through intuition what others attain only through the slower process of reasoning. The Epilogue to Browning's "Dramatis Personae" contains more and better theology than many a theological treatise. It reports a supposed discussion between King David and Renan, with the

poet standing by as arbiter and judge and rendering the final verdict. David speaks for Hebrew supernaturalism. He pictures the pomp and splendor of the ancient temple worship, with its stately ritual and elaborate ceremonial. The discussion takes place at the time of the feast of dedication. The robed priests and the Levites give the signal for the hosts of Israel to assemble. Moved by the sound of the music and the spectacle of the smoke and the flame of the sacrificial fires, the people bow before the visible presence of Jehovah.

> "Then the temple filled with a cloud,
>   Even the house of the Lord;
> Porch bent and pillar bowed;
>   For the presence of the Lord,
> In the glory of the cloud,
>   Had filled the house of the Lord."

To Renan, the skeptic, all this savored of the superstition of a past age. He had drunk deep of the springs of scientific knowledge and, for him, the last spark of the ancient faith had been extinguished. The face which seemed, to others, to materialize amid

the smoke of the altar and was so real that it called forth the worship of an adoring multitude, had been swallowed up in darkness. The star, which once shone so brightly, had "lost itself in the multitude of lesser lights." He tried to pierce the heavens, but in vain. He longed for the return of the ancient symbols, but to no avail. The mood of faith had departed and he was left alone with his skepticism and despair. Nowhere can we find a truer expression of the sense of loss which attends the dissipation of one's childhood faith under the withering touch of science than in Renan's last lines.

"Oh, dread succession to a dizzy post,
Sad sway of sceptre whose mere touch appals,
Ghastly dethronement, cursed by those the most
On whose repugnant brow the crown next falls."

Such is the inevitable result when God is banished from his universe and man becomes monarch of all he surveys.

Then speaks the poet. To a world thus mentally and spiritually distraught he delivers his message. David and Renan, piet-

ist and skeptic, both have erred,—one in the materializing of faith, the other in the abandonment of faith. God will not reveal himself in response to the pomp and splendor of ritual worship. Neither will he abdicate his throne at the behest of science. The world throbs and pulsates with his life and is informed by his spirit. The face, which once looked out from the smoke and the flame, now tabernacles within each human heart. The star, which once illumined the heavens, now shines in the firmament of each human soul. One whose universe is thus filled with God has no need of a temple made with hands. One who is conscious of the presence of God in his own soul does not need to scan the heavens for miracle or sign. As Browning says:

"Why, where's the need of a Temple, when the walls
O' the world are that? What use of swells and falls,
From Levites' choir, Priests' cries and trumpet calls?
That one face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Becomes my universe that feels and knows."

We shall look far for a finer expression of

religious faith. A universe that feels and knows, that is conscious and intelligent, is itself God and every constituent part of it is an expression of the life of God. The poet's verdict is confirmed by the reasoned judgment of mankind.

The first question which one is prompted to ask concerning this God who is at once immanent and transcendent is, "Is he real? Or is he the invention of priestcraft and superstition?" This question never presented itself to our fathers, with their tiny universe and their tinier God. He was simply a magnified type of the world emperor, and his sway was as arbitrary and irresponsible as that of any earthly ruler. As long as this conception survived, it made possible all sorts of schemes for mediation and intercession. It fixed a great gulf between God and man. He could be approached only at stated seasons, through prescribed functionaries and after suitable propitiation. All the conventional machinery of medieval court circles was duplicated in the traditional theology. It was a great day for priest-

craft and ecclesiasticism; but a sad day for pure and undefiled religion.

Such a conception could endure only as long as the circle of ideas which gave it birth. We live in a world which is immeasurably larger than that which was known to our fathers. Its dimensions have been pushed out through all space and yet we know that beyond the remotest star which the telescope has revealed there are worlds without number. Its history has been pushed back through all time and yet we know that at the earliest authentic date which the historian can discover the world was hundreds of millenniums old and human society in comparatively an advanced state of development. Can we wonder that men have been so overwhelmed by this sudden enlargement of the universe that their faith in God has been shaken and sometimes completely destroyed? In a real universe, reaching back through infinite time and out through infinite space, what becomes of God? Can we think of him as real, as actually existing, and especially as interested in the activities and

watching over the welfare of the inhabitants of what, at best, is but a second rate planet in one of the smaller solar systems?

Such questions are not academic; they are real. And yet they are not flattering to the human intellect. Why should the larger universe demand a smaller God? Or why should it be able to subsist with no God? Science has not accounted for the world when it has succeeded in explaining its laws. A law accounts for nothing. It simply describes a mode of operation. Back of all the affirmations of science we find the same questions which baffled our fathers. Who first established the world? Who ordained its laws? Who assigned its destiny? To such questions there is but one answer, and that is, "God." We may call him by different names or by no name at all, but in the last analysis we are obliged to seek an explanation of the universe in the existence of some supreme and sovereign power. Instead of dispensing with God, we have simply taken him from his tiny throne in the heavens and allowed him to enthrone himself in the uni-

verse. Without him the world is unintelligible. It cannot be explained as a chance collocation of atoms or as a haphazard concatenation of blind forces. Its progress can be understood only in the light of an intelligent and controlling purpose. But intelligence and purpose are attributes of conscious personality, not of material atoms and physical forces. The highest affirmation of modern science is the fundamental assumption of all religion,—the affirmation of the universe as the expression of the ceaseless activity of an intelligent and purposeful Being. To the eye that sees, as to Mrs. Browning,

> "Earth's crammed with heaven
> And every common bush aflame with God."

Can we think of this God as personal? Our answer will depend upon what we understand by personality. To many it suggests finiteness. H. G. Wells pictures his Invisible King as having a definite beginning in time, struggling ever toward perfection and summoning us to assist him in the struggle. Otherwise, writes Mr. Wells, he could

not be a person, for "to be a person is to have characteristics and to be limited by characteristics." Such a conception springs from the fact that we know personality only in its finite, human form. It exists unlimited and complete only in God. Instead of being finite, he is the only being who is infinite. Instead of being limited, he is the only being who transcends all limitations. It is just this absence of finitude and limitation that makes him God. We could not long stand in awe of one who is only a little more powerful than ourselves. Nor bow in reverence before one who is only a little wiser and better. Personality implies thought, feeling, will, and these are known to us only as they are embodied in human form. Raise these to infinite power and we have an infinite personality. We have God. The heart and soul of all religion is the consciousness that we live "under his eye and by his power." We can still "smile" when we think that "His Greatness flows around our incompleteness, round our restlessness His Rest."

But can we claim such a God as our Father? In the thought of his magnitude, do not all fatherly qualities disappear? Can we think of an infinite Father consenting to the late war with all its horrors? Or standing complacent in the midst of our present industrial strife? Such questions betray a mistaken conception of infinitude. Even an infinite being cannot create a universe of law and order and then set at naught the laws which he has ordained. He cannot endow men with free wills as evidence of moral capacity and then stand between them and the consequences of their misdeeds. Even an earthly father sometimes chastises his children and the Heavenly Father is not freed from this necessity. "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth." Whether or not God is our father depends, not upon the magnitude of his world, but upon the relationship which he sustains to his children. The essence of fatherhood is community of nature. This community of nature has not been disturbed by our enlarging conception of the world in which we live. The life that

thrills our being is still his life. The love that gives meaning and worth to life is still the reflection of his love. The will that gives to love its effectiveness is still an expression of his power. The conscience which gives to the will its direction and aim is still the shadow of his goodness. These are all different phases of the life of God in the souls of men. Who but a father imparts his life to his children, shields them with his love, prompts them to do the right and rebukes them when wrong? The Fatherhood of God, instead of being lost in this larger universe, is revealed for the first time in all its fullness. All human experience points to the presence of a living, loving, benevolent and beneficent personality who holds the worlds in his embrace and is not far from any one of us. He is our Father in Heaven and our ever present friend and helper upon the earth.

Why has this conception been so slow in winning the acceptance of the religious world? Why is it that even now it is so often called into question? Largely because

of the traditional attitude of the church. Instead of faith in God it has emphasized certain beliefs about God. It is no longer necessary to discuss the attempt of our Trinitarian friends to confine God within the limits of a mathematical formula. To-day this formula is either repudiated or explained away by the descendants of those who first framed it. The effectual argument against Calvinism is not mathematical but moral. Its real offense was not that it promulgated certain conceptions of God which affronted the intellect, but that it ascribed to God certain attributes which affronted the moral sense so that good men revolted from them in horror. We have a right to demand that God shall be as good as the best of men, and yet we should hesitate to ascribe to the worst of men conduct which the old theology ascribed to God. As one of our liberal thinkers once said to a Calvinistic friend, "Your God is my devil." He was not a father but a fiend. Worship implies worth. Where there is no worth, worship is impossible.

## GOD

If we seek the highest revelation of God, we must look for it in the highest product of creative evolution, man himself. To receive the best revelation, we must sit at the feet of the best of men. This is what makes Jesus the supreme revealer of God. Others had thought of God as their father, but with them the relationship was purely physical. God was a sort of prehistoric ancestor, a mythical parent, from whom the tribe or clan traced its descent. With Jesus the relationship was purely spiritual. Seizing upon a word which symbolizes one of the most familiar of human relationships, he made it the expression of his own best thought concerning God and his relation to men. With him God was not the Allmighty King, nor the All-righteous Judge; he was the All-loving Father. We acknowledge our debt to Jesus, not because he was the first to invent the phrase or to discover the relationship, but because he was the first to make it the central feature of his religious teaching. In the words which were most often upon his lips, "Our Father," we have

the most fundamental fact in human experience expressed in the simplest and most intelligible form. Beyond that we do not need to go. It is the highest conception that the human intellect can reach or the human heart desire. As Unitarians we are content to sit at Jesus' feet and learn of his Father and our Father, his God and our God.

**What think ye of Christ?**

***Matthew XXII, 42.***

**Born of the seed of David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God, with power, according to the spirit of holiness.**

***Romans I, 3–4.***

## JESUS

WHAT think ye of Christ? This is one of the most absorbing questions of Christian history. It is the one question which remains to differentiate evangelical from non-evangelical Christianity. Other questions which once divided men have been answered satisfactorily or relegated to an oblivion from which they ought never to be recalled. This remains as the most widely applied test of Christian fellowship. Membership in the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America and the Interchurch World Movement is conditioned by it. Men are judged by their opinions about Jesus, not by their success or failure in appropriating to themselves the spirit of Jesus. It is this that gives peculiar significance to the Unitarian answer.

Unitarians believe, with St. Paul, that Jesus was born of the seed of David accord-

ing to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God according to the spirit of holiness. In other words, he was born a purely human child and revealed his divine origin by the purity of his life and the nobility of his character. They also believe, with the great apostle, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. These beliefs however are not peculiar to Unitarians. They are accepted by all Christian people. All admit that God was incarnate in Jesus. They differ only as to the nature and extent of this incarnation. Is it an accomplished fact or a continuous process? Was God present in Jesus alone or is he present in all humanity? If he was present only in the one historic figure, Jesus of Nazareth, we have no right to call him "Father." If he is present in humanity at large, we have no right to call him anything else. Thus the whole question of our filial relationship to God and our fraternal relationship to one another depends upon our conception of the incarnation. It is a doctrine fundamental to Christianity.

Historically this doctrine is an outgrowth of human experience. The early Christians were compelled to account for the character and personality of Jesus and for his wonderful influence over the hearts and lives of men. True children of their age, they attributed them to the fact that God was present in him in a manner which could not be affirmed of other men and then sought to account for this miraculous presence. One group of writers found the explanation in the peculiar circumstances which attended his birth. They asserted that the Holy Spirit usurped the place of a human father, and consequently that Jesus was miraculously conceived and miraculously born. Another group of writers found this explanation puerile and unsatisfactory. They sought another by resort to philosophic speculation. They affirmed that Jesus was the incarnate Logos, or Word, which had become flesh and dwelt among men, full of grace and truth. This is the fundamental distinction between the first three gospels and the fourth. The Christian church has accepted and perpetu-

ated both of these explanations, notwithstanding the fact that they are mutually contradictory and destructive. If Jesus was the child of Mary through the agency of the Holy Spirit, he was not the incarnate Logos. If he was the incarnate Logos, the Holy Spirit could have had nothing to do with his coming into the world.

It is the consciousness of this discrepancy which has led to the reopening of the whole question. A study of the New Testament records for the purpose of ascertaining the facts concerning Jesus' birth has made confusion worse confounded. St. Paul and two of the gospel writers maintain an absolute silence concerning it, while the two who mention it, Matthew and Luke, are in hopeless disagreement. Both give the genealogy of Jesus, but they differ in the number of generations between him and David and in the names of those through whom the descent was maintained. Both trace that descent through Joseph, which would be absolutely meaningless if Jesus were not his son. Both contain an annunciation, but in one it is to

Mary and in the other to Joseph. Both locate the birth in Bethlehem, but in one the parents live in Nazareth and are summoned to Bethlehem at an opportune moment, while in the other they live in Bethlehem, but flee to Nazareth in order to escape the wrath of Herod. When we turn from these birth stories to the main portions of the gospels, we find nothing in the words of Jesus or Mary or any of the disciples to indicate that Jesus had ever lived in Bethlehem, or that his birth had been different from that of other Hebrew children of that period.

A candid examination of these birth stories proves conclusively that the writers were indulging their fancy and not recording facts. They were trying to account for the impression which Jesus made upon his fellows, and they did it in the only way in which the men of that day could account for a personality which seemed to transcend the limits of humanity. With their conception of human nature as essentially depraved and corrupt, they were obliged to attribute to him superhuman origin and supernatural

power. The history of ancient peoples and of primitive religions affords many a parallel. In Egypt, Apis was said to have been born of a virgin and to have been the incarnation of Osiris. Chang Tao Ling, in China, Krishna and Buddha in India, and countless heroes of Greek and Roman mythology were similarly honored. With our better understanding of the dignity and worth of human nature, we are no longer under the necessity of resorting to such crude methods of explaining the exceptional among our fellowmen. We no longer regard the birth of Jesus as in any way supernatural or miraculous. We cannot believe that we add to its impressiveness by removing it from the category of normal human births. To assume that the Saviour of the world must enter life by some other channel is an insult to human motherhood which could have been perpetrated only in an age which cherished a low estimate of human nature. It is the work of those who, in the words of Sir Edwin Arnold,

> "Dimly see thy godlike self and take
> True glory from thee for false glory's sake."

The explanation found at the beginning of the Fourth Gospel fares little better at the hands of the New Testament critics. It is possible today to trace it directly to its varied sources. It is a crude mixture of Hebrew mysticism, Greek philosophy and Alexandrian metaphysics. The achievement of the author of this gospel was made possible by the Hebrew custom of personifying wisdom. The book of Proverbs states that Jehovah, by the aid of wisdom, founded the earth; also that wisdom was brought forth before the world was made and was present at the time of its creation. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks of Jesus as the wisdom of God. There was a similar tendency to personify the divine word. Isaiah puts into the mouth of Jehovah the declaration, "My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

A parallel effort to personify the attributes of deity had been made among the Greeks. Plato conceived of the universe as

a living, rational being, who revealed himself to the human reason through a series of ideas or words. This conception was taken up by the Stoics and made one of the great agencies for the intellectual and moral advancement of the Greco-Roman world. To Philo, the Alexandrian Jew, belongs the credit for fusing the Stoic philosophy and the Hebrew metaphysic into a theological system which would not be repugnant to the strict monotheism of the Jews. He identified the Hebrew Wisdom with the Greek Logos or Word, and affirmed that it was the agent of creation and the instrument of revelation. "The Word was with God and it was God. Through him all things were made and in him all things consist."

Although Philo personified this Word of God, he never conceived of it as incarnate in an historic human personality. For this step we are indebted to the unknown author of the Fourth Gospel. He was the first to identify the Logos with the historic Jesus. To Paul and the earlier gospel writers, Jesus was the Son of God. To Philo, the Logos was the

Son of God. The author of the Fourth Gospel, proceeding upon the assumption that things that are equal to the same thing are equal to each other, identified Jesus with the Logos and ascribed to him its unique attributes and powers. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." This is the voice of Philo, the Alexandrian Jew. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among men." This is the contribution of the gospel writer. It is the first clear expression of the embodiment of the Logos in Jesus and constitutes the scriptural basis of the doctrine of the incarnation. The eternal Logos or Word had become incarnate in a finite human being. It was no longer a philosophical abstraction; it had become an object of faith and love.

The importance of the service rendered by this conception cannot be overestimated. The Greek mind thought of God as immanent in his universe. The Hebrew mind thought of him as dwelling apart from his universe. It was constitutionally unfitted

to receive the conception of an immanent God except as it was mediated through another being. Thus far the doctrine served a beneficent end. It preserved the doctrine of a divine humanity at a time when men could conceive of it in no other terms. At the same time, by removing Jesus from the sphere of humanity and endowing him with superhuman attributes, it made it impossible for him to be conceived of as humanity's ideal. The Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is devoid of almost every human attribute. The story of his life is robbed of almost every human characteristic. There is no baptism, no temptation, no proclamation of the coming kingdom, no agony in the garden, no cry of despair on the cross. All these are inconsistent with the dignity of the incarnate Logos. The prolonged discourses which the author puts into the mouth of Jesus make it certain that he thought of him as essentially different in nature from other men and sustaining different relations with the Father. The ideal which he exemplified was impossible of either imitation or realization

by them. And so, as the thought of the divine immanence came to be more widely accepted and better understood, this conception went the way of its predecessor. It lost its power of appeal. As men learn to appreciate the essential oneness of the life of the universe, they turn from the mythical Christ of the Fourth Gospel, to the Jesus of the other three, only to find that the moral and religious value of his life is not lessened, but enhanced, by the recognition of its purely human character.

But what of the incarnation? Shall it be eliminated from the scheme of Christian doctrine? Not at all. The experience out of which it grew is as valid as ever. The impression which Jesus' life and character make upon Christian men and women has grown stronger with each succeeding generation. If we reject the traditional explanation of his influence over the hearts and lives of men, we are morally bound to find some explanation of it which shall be more in accord with the facts. The modern man is compelled to translate the old doctrine into

the terms of the new theology and of the new science. It is God in Christ appealing to the God in us, which accounts for the growing power of the Christ ideal. The defect of the older conception was not that it claimed too much for Jesus, but that it claimed too little for humanity. What it affirmed of him, we affirm of the race. Instead of putting him in a class by himself, too remote from us to be spiritually helpful, we welcome him as the first born of many brethren. And the distinctive merit of this larger conception is that it does justice to all concerned. It does not degrade God by assuming that he could embody himself in a single historic personality. It does not degrade Jesus by reducing him to the level of a "mere man." It does not degrade humanity by assuming that it is separated from God by a gulf which Christ alone can bridge. The grace that was in Jesus is latent in us. The divine love and wisdom revealed through him are constantly seeking expression through us.

Such a conception may seem to be a wide departure from the traditional doctrine, but

it is the only conception which science makes possible. Belief in an immanent God makes it necessary to assume that the life of God is manifest in every part of his creation. The form and magnitude of this manifestation is conditioned by the nature and capacity of the medium through which it is revealed. In stock and stone, in plant and tree, in the conscious life of the lower animals, we behold the varying manifestations of the life of God. In one it is force, in another vital energy, in another consciousness, and yet,

> "God is seen God,
> In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, . . . in the clod."

Let us assume that, throughout the ages, there has been a constant increase in this capacity to receive and show forth the life of God, until, at last, there appears a creature capable of standing erect, turning his gaze heavenward and reflecting not only the power and the glory of God, but also his goodness and wisdom and love. For ages God had been waiting patiently for the evo-

lution of just such a medium. When it appeared, he breathed into it his spirit and it became a living soul. This is the real miracle of the incarnation. It is not the incarnation of God in the person of one man centuries ago, but the progressive embodiment of the life of God in the souls of men throughout the ages. In the words of R. J. Campbell, "All human history is the progressive incarnation of God," and all human life "divine, and eternal, integral to the being of God."

Let us assume, also, that there has been a constant evolution of this higher medium, until, at length, there appears one with a soul so sensitive to every breath of the eternal spirit and a will so in accord with the divine will that in him men thought that they beheld the Father himself. They said, "This is the Christ, the Son of the living God." And yet his value for our moral and spiritual life lies in the fact that this Christ never transcends human limits. In him we see humanity at its best. Whatever differences there may be between him and us are differ-

ences of degree and not of kind. What he was, we are destined to become.

> "Progress is the law of life, man is not
> Man as yet,
> Nor shall I deem his object served,
> his end
> Attained"

until

> "all mankind alike is perfected."

Browning is right. Our task on earth will never be accomplished until all mankind is perfected, until all grow into the stature of perfect manhood as revealed to us in Jesus.

This is the Unitarian conception of Jesus. He is not a God to be worshipped but a leader to be followed. As President Burton has said: "He was all God could be in human terms." If we would know the effectiveness of such a conception we have only to turn to the lives of those who have cherished it. It has been maintained that the strength of orthodoxy is its loyalty to the personal Christ and its sense of dependence upon him, both of which are supposed to be

confirmed by a belief in his deity. Also that the weakness of liberal Christianity is its failure to inspire this feeling of personal loyalty and responsibility. But why? Why should the man Jesus exercise a less potent influence for good than the deified Jesus? Why should his appeal to our personal allegiance be less imperative and strong? Why should we think less of one who is capable of being a real leader than of one who at best is only a play actor on the cosmic stage? Must intelligence always be purchased at the expense of faith, and independence at the expense of devotion?

Today the world yearns as never before for Christian unity. One of the greatest steps toward the achievement of this goal would be the acceptance, by all Christian people, of this humanitarian conception of the person and work of Jesus. At heart the great majority of them accept it today. Evangelical Christians have tried to make the belief in the deity of Christ the sole condition of religious fellowship and yet their very language proves that what they have

in mind is not deity but divinity. They criticize the liberal churches for their denial of the divinity of Jesus, when what they have in mind is not divinity but deity. Has not the time come to put an end to this purely verbal controversy, accustom ourselves to the same vocabulary, and unite in such loyal devotion to one common Lord and Master that all speculation as to his deity or divinity shall be swallowed up in the consciousness of his perfect humanity? Admit, with Tennyson, that he was

> "Most human and yet most divine,
> The flower of man and God."

and we can say, with Richard Watson Gilder:

> "If Jesus Christ is a man,
>   And only a man, I say
> That of all mankind I cleave to him
>   And to him will I cleave alway;
>
> If Jesus Christ is a God,
>   And the only God, I swear
> I will follow him through heaven and hell,
>   The earth, the sea and the air."

**Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you.**

***1 Corinthians III, 16.***

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

SECOND only in importance to the belief concerning the person and work of Jesus is that concerning the office and function of the Holy Spirit. Both problems have their origin in the gradual disintegration of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. In other days the solution was perfectly simple. The Holy Spirit was the third member in that Trinity, sharing with the Father and the Son the honor of representing the divine Being. As such he was a distinct personality, with functions quite distinct from those of the other two. Now that we have restored to God his absolute and undivided unity and assigned to Jesus his rightful place among men, what becomes of the Holy Spirit? Can we think of it as an independent personality, contending the absoluteness of the Father? Or as the third member in a metaphysical and wholly incomprehensible Trinity? Or must we think of

it as the power of God, working silently but persistently, and conforming all things to his will? It is to this latter view that Unitarians are irrevocably committed.

The traditional doctrine was the result of a gradual growth. When St. Paul made his second visit to Ephesus, he found there a little group of Christians, converts of Apollos, and asked: "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?" They replied: "We did not so much as hear whether there is a Holy Spirit." Three centuries later Gregory of Nanzianzus, one of the church fathers, wrote: "Of our thoughtful men, some regard the Holy Spirit as an operation, some as a creature, some as God, while others are at a loss to decide, seeing that the Scripture determines nothing on this subject." Shortly before his death Professor Royce, of Harvard, declared that "The central problem in our present attempt at a theology must be that which traditional Christian theology has so strangely neglected, the problem of what the religious consciousness has called the Holy Spirit."

"Here," he adds, "lies the real central idea of any distinctive Christian metaphysic." These quotations suggest the stages through which the doctrine has passed. First, ignorance of the Spirit's existence; second, uncertainty as to its nature and function; and third, conviction as to its importance as central to an intelligent understanding of the Christian faith.

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit is the medium of revelation and the instrument of the divine activity. In the birth stories it usurps the place of the natural father and Jesus is born of a virgin. At the baptism it descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove. When Jesus is about to leave his disciples he promises to send the Holy Spirit to comfort them and to guide them into a larger understanding of the truth. The one unforgivable sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost it was the descent of the Holy Spirit which accounted for the marvellous phenomena which we associate with that day. St. Paul is so convinced that it is the presence of the Holy Spirit which

accounts for Jesus' power that he does not attempt to differentiate one from the other. He uses the terms interchangeably. Now it is Christ that dwells in the new convert and makes him a new creature and again it is the Spirit. Once he says unequivocally, "Now the Lord," meaning the risen Christ, not the historical Jesus, "Now the Lord is the Spirit." The apostolic benediction alone attempts a differentiation. That is why it is so often interpreted as a Trinitarian formula. If so it could not have been used by Paul. Whatever else he may have been, he was not a Trinitarian. Writing to the Christians at Corinth he asks that the grace that had been manifest in Jesus might be manifest in them, that the love of God which had been the source of his inspiration might be with them, and that the consciousness of fellowship with the Father through the indwelling of his spirit might also be theirs. It requires some imagination to see in this an affirmation of the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity had its origin in the custom of joining together, for litur-

gical purposes, the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A familiar instance is the baptismal formula in which Jesus bids his disciples baptize in the name of these three. At first there was no attempt to unite them as separate persons in one Godhead, or to conceive of them as distinct personalities. When, however, the necessity for a definite creed arose, this baptismal formula presented itself as a most convenient skeleton or framework. A study of the great creeds of Christendom, the Apostles', the Nicene and the Athanasian, will demonstrate that each is simply the elaboration of this primitive formula.

Even when the Holy Spirit came to be regarded as the third member in the Trinity, its subordinate position was scrupulously maintained. In the earliest draft of the Apostles' creed, dating from the second century, twelve words are devoted to God, seventy to Jesus and only six to the Holy Spirit. For six centuries the simple statement, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," remained practically unchanged. The great

controversies of the early church raged about the nature of God and the person and work of Christ. Belief in the Holy Spirit was admitted with no attempt to define its nature or to prescribe its function. Later attempts at definition led to a controversy which rent the church in twain. To this day the chief distinction between the Greek and the Roman divisions of the Catholic church is that one believes that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, the other that it comes forth from both the Father and the Son. Those who stand wholly outside of the controversy cannot understand how, if it is a distinct personality, it can proceed from either. And yet, in spite of these differences of interpretation, a dogma which is unscriptural, unscientific and illogical, is still retained as a part of the ecclesiastical furniture of certain churches under the assumption that it is essential to the Christian life. The continued existence of our free churches is an emphatic protest against this assumption.

One of the characteristics of the newer religious thinking is that it substitutes common

sense for metaphysical speculation and clearness of thought for an unreasoning faith. After centuries of theological controversy it enables us to say, with St. Paul, "To us there is one God, the Father; and one Lord, Jesus Christ; and one Spirit, by which we are all baptized into one body." With this change of attitude the Holy Spirit assumes a position of dignity and importance. It is the inevitable corollary of a belief in the divine immanence. As long as God was thought of as transcendent, dwelling somewhere apart from his world, it was only through the Spirit that he could have intercourse with that world. With an immanent God such mediation becomes superfluous. The Holy Spirit is God himself at work in his world. The divine life has been present in the world from the beginning. Throughout the ages it has expressed itself in ever higher forms of consciousness. In the Hebrew people, because of their inherent religiousness, it found its freest channel. And in Jesus Christ, a Jewish peasant, it found its highest expression. It was through this

indwelling Spirit that he became the supreme revelation of God to man, "all that God could be in human terms."

This is the only conception of the nature and function of the Holy Spirit which is compatible with that theory of the universe and its relation to God which is the basis of all present-day thinking. Science has taught us to recognize a spiritual force, an infinite personality, at the heart of the universe, animating it and dominating it as the soul animates and dominates the body. It has also taught us that there can be no consistent theory of the universe which fails to take account of its highest product, man himself. If the world is a unity, we must be a part of that larger unity, and the same power which manifests itself in the world at large must throb and pulsate in us. This does not imply that all are reduced to one dead level of uniformity. There is diversity even in spiritual gifts. The capacity to receive determines the ability to reveal. One may be a Jesus, another a Paul, another the most ordinary type of humanity,

but it is the same spirit which fills them all, each according to his capacity. The life which animates us is a part of the life of God. The love which binds us to one another is a reflection of his love. The will which keeps us constant to an ever ascending goal is an expression of his purpose. The sense of right and duty which informs that will and helps to determine our conduct is but another name for that "stern daughter of the voice of God" who holds the worlds in her embrace and "prevents the very stars from going wrong."

Thus an attempt to know and to understand our common human nature brings us irresistibly to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is still a constant factor in human life and destiny. The life that thrills our being, the love that gives significance to life, the will that enables love to express itself in action, and the conscience that keeps that action clean and pure, are but differing phases of the life of God in the souls of men. They are just as real and just as significant as the energy that drives the

world on in its course, or the affinity that holds its parts together, or the force that enables it to do its work, or the system of checks and balances that keeps that force within certain prescribed bounds. All alike point to the presence of a living, loving, willing and beneficent personality who inhabiteth the eternities and yet is not far from any one of us.

> "Speak to him thou, for he hears,
>   And spirit with spirit can meet;
> Closer is he than breathing,
>   Nearer than hands or feet."

Today this conception of the Holy Spirit as but another name for God at work in his world is accepted by many who repudiate the Unitarian name. Nowhere do we find it more clearly expressed than in "The Christian Doctrine of God," by Dr. William Newton Clarke, an orthodox scholar of good and regular standing. He declares that God expresses himself not only in Christ, but also in the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit is Himself, God within." Its function is to continue, in

the individual and the race, the work which Jesus began. "God, through Christ, is normalizing men," bringing them to the proper life and character as sons. The Spirit is called holy only in contrast with an unholy world. It is "God in his people." Dr. Clarke concludes: "God himself is the Father; God himself is the divine in the Son; and God himself is the Holy Spirit."

Today this is good orthodoxy. It is also good Unitarianism. It is the attitude of the Christian world toward this conception which will determine the religion of the future. The religion of Jesus was primarily the religion of the Father. It was based upon the family relationship raised to infinite power. The religion of the early church was the religion of the Son. It centred in the person and work of Christ. More and more the religion of today is becoming essentially the religion of the Spirit. We have given up all questions as to its procession from the Father or the Son. We are trying to forget that it was ever the third member in an impossible Trinity. We are ac-

customing ourselves to think of it as "the perpetual witness of the life of God in the soul of man." As Dr. Peabody has said: "It is the immanent power of science, the progressive revelation of philosophy, the undeparting and undiminished inspiration of religion."

This is the conception which must more and more commend itself to thoughtful men and women. Churches may continue to differ in their dogmas and creeds, Christian men and women may differ in their belief and practice, and yet all may unite in the simple but sufficient affirmation, "We believe in the Holy Spirit." Just as we cannot think of the sun apart from its rays of light and heat, so we cannot think of God apart from that subtle influence which radiates from him and gives life and light to the world. It is none other than the spirit of the living God, spiritual because he is Spirit, holy because he is Holy. Science affirms that the world in which we live is a spiritual world; faith assures us that the spirit which upholds and sustains it is the spirit of the

living God; and the experience of every day teaches us that it is that same spirit which dwells in us and makes us his temples.

"Go not, my soul, in search of him,
  Thou wilt not find him there,—
Or in the depths of shadow dim,
  Or heights of upper air.

For not in far-off realms of space
  The Spirit hath its throne;
In every heart it findeth place
  And waiteth to be known."

**Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for instruction which is in righteousness.**

*2 Timothy III, 16.*

## THE BIBLE

THE Unitarian attitude toward the Bible derives its chief importance from the frequent assertion that we do not believe in the Bible. All that this statement means is that we do not accept this or any other book as our sole guide in morals and religion. We regard the Bible as a human document, written by men and for men, and subject to the ordinary rules of criticism and research. Today this attitude is shared by the more scholarly men in all denominations. The *Outlook* stated recently that "It is clearly worse than futile for clergymen to insist that there has been no such revolution. It is clearly their duty to prepare their congregations to meet it by showing them that the religious life is not identified with or dependent upon the old, unscientific view of the scripture as an infallible rule of faith and practice."

It would be difficult to find a more glar-

ing inconsistency than that between the world's estimate of the Bible and its ignorance of the Bible. Here is a book which is found upon the pulpit of every Christian church. It is to be seen, often in an excellent state of preservation, in almost every Christian home. It is the chief text-book in our schools of religious education. Lists of the world's best literature, coming from the most divergent sources, give it first place. When President Eliot was asked why he had omitted it from his six-foot book shelf for Harvard men, he replied that he had assumed that it would be found in the possession of every Harvard graduate. It has been printed in more languages and circulated in more lands than any other book. And yet, over against these facts, testifying to the world's appreciation of its intrinsic worth, we find the most colossal ignorance of its character and contents. There are multitudes of people who seem amazed when told that it is not a book at all, but a collection of books, and that its nearest analogy today is not some religious or theological treatise but

one of the many libraries of the world's best literature. As to the authorship and dates of the various books of which it is composed, or the growth of its several canons or groups, or its interpretation in the light of present-day criticism, the great masses of men and women are hopelessly uninformed.

How are we to account for this situation? How are we to reconcile the apparent appreciation and the seeming neglect? It is due to the fact that the traditional conception of the Bible and the conventional methods of Bible study have alienated the great majority of thinking people. No arguments based upon intellectual or moral considerations have any weight if opposed to one solitary proof text. Passages are wrested from their context and twisted in their meaning for the purpose of supporting theological statements which often are irrational and sometimes repugnant to the moral sense. It is this misuse of the Bible which has made it, in the words of Reginald Campbell, "one of the greatest stumbling-blocks to spiritual religion."

This method of interpretation is a heritage from the time when Christianity was emancipating itself from the yoke of the Roman church. The Protestant Reformation was undertaken in the name of the individual reason and conscience but its leaders did not dare to trust their new-found freedom. They repudiated one authority only to submit themselves to another. In place of a divinely instituted church they installed a divinely inspired book. According to Catholic theory, the inspired book must be interpreted by an infallible church. Whatever errors it might seem to contain could then be explained away by the interpreters. But Protestantism found itself burdened with an infallible book for which there was no such interpreter, and therefore no safeguard against error. Between these two theories of interpretation, reason and common sense are both on the side of the Roman Catholic. Either we must abandon altogether the fetish of an infallible book, or we must find some way to secure an infallible interpreter.

Unitarians prefer to abandon the fetish. In common with all thinking people, they recognize but two alternatives. The Bible is either a divine institution or a human document. Either it is wholly inspired, in the sense that every word is the word of God, dictated and transmitted without error, or it is inspired only in the sense that all truth is from God and that every expression of truth, whatever its source, is a divine revelation. To those who are acquainted with the history of the Bible, its different versions, its scientific and historical inaccuracies, its conflicting expressions of moral and religious truth, the first alternative is impossible. It deserves to be laid away with the theory of a geocentric universe and a stationary earth.

The other alternative affords us all that is needed to inspire a reverence for the Bible as, to quote Abraham Lincoln's words, "The best book God has given to men." It is a record of the thoughts and aspirations and ideals of the most religious people of the ancient world. Nowhere can we find more

exalted conceptions of the character of God or loftier ideals of the conduct of man. It is not an infallible utterance of moral and religious truth and it cannot be used as an infallible guide to either faith or practice, but rightly interpreted, it nourishes and sustains the moral and spiritual life of the race as no other book does or can.

What has given us this newer method of interpretation? It is the much misunderstood and much abused higher criticism. There is nothing concerning which there has been so much inexcusable misunderstanding and unreasoning fear. It has been denounced as hostile to the Bible and to religion. It has been characterized as destructive of the foundations of faith and morals. And yet it is this which has made the Bible intelligible and helpful to modern men and women. Without it, it would long since have been relegated to oblivion by all who have emancipated themselves from the fetters of credulity and superstition. If compelled to choose between the Bible as everywhere the word of God and no Bible at all,

one's choice would be no Bible at all. When permitted to choose between an intelligent understanding of the Bible and ignorance of its profound moral and religious truths, there is but one alternative.

And what is this higher criticism? How is it differentiated from any other criticism? It is the criticism of the Bible books and of the documents upon which they are based considered as wholes. It is only in this respect that it differs from the lower criticism. One is textual, the other documental. One deals with particular words and phrases, the other with whole books or groups of books. One seeks to discover the true reading of the Bible text and to ascertain its original meaning; the other seeks to establish its genuineness and authenticity and to demonstrate its credibility and trustworthiness. Thus between the two there can be no jealousy or antagonism. They occupy different fields; they deal with different sets of facts; they are directed toward different ends. To say that one is higher than the other in the sense that it calls for the exercise of higher facul-

ties is to say what would be repudiated by every member of both schools.

The question is often raised as to whether the higher criticism is constructive or destructive. Such a query has no significance whatsoever for one who is at all familiar with the processes. In its aim it is neither; in its methods it is both. It is simply the application to the Bible literature of the most approved scientific and critical methods. These methods are destructive only in the sense that the destruction of error is often the necessary preparation for the discovery of truth. The tearing down and the building up are parts of one and the same process. The same is true of all search for truth. We do not hesitate to destroy old error if thereby some new truth can be revealed, and we judge of the process by the end achieved, not by the means employed. When Copernicus demonstrated that the earth revolves around the sun he destroyed forever the old Ptolemaic theory that the sun revolves around the earth. When Columbus proved that the earth is a globe

by sailing round it, he destroyed forever the theory that it is a flat surface, with its four corners. The destructive work of the higher critics has been of this sort. It has destroyed, "not the Scriptures, not theology, not religion, but only a wrong interpretation of the Scriptures, a narrow conception of theology, and the pagan features of religion." When it was demonstrated that several different authors collaborated in the composition of the first five books of the Old Testament, it was not necessary for the higher critic to assure us that they could not have been written by Moses or any one Old Testament writer. When it was proved that the second part of Isaiah refers to events which happened more than one hundred years after the death of the great prophet of that name, it required no extraordinary critical power to infer that we have here the work of at least two different men, probably more, living more than a century apart, and all ascribed to a single writer. This is the kind of destructive work which it has been the privilege of the higher critics to do, and for

which the Christian world ought to be profoundly grateful. If any Christian dogma has been destroyed by the process, it is fair to assume that the dogma was wrong. Truth itself cannot be destroyed so easily. When any theory, Biblical or otherwise, is proved to be out of accord with the facts, it is only a mistaken sense of loyalty which insists upon its retention and abuses those who have furnished the proof.

The Unitarian conception of the Bible rests squarely upon the results of the work of these higher critics. We no longer regard the Bible as supernaturally inspired. We no longer look upon it as everywhere the infallible word of God. We no longer turn to it with the expectation of finding precise directions as to our conduct in all possible emergencies. As we comprehend its nature and understand the working of men's minds in unscientific periods, and under circumstances similar to those which surrounded the Biblical writers, we detect the folly of any theory of infallibility or inerrancy. "It is worth inquiring," writes Professor Youtz,

an orthodox scholar, "whether the very phrase Holy Bible does not create a wrong mental attitude, an attitude of Bibliolatry, toward a book whose effort is to fix our reverence upon the only One who is Holy." And yet this modern attitude does not lessen our reverence or esteem for the book itself. The fact that it contains historical inaccuracies and verbal ambiguities does not make it less worthy as a medium for the revelation of the divine will. Because of the lofty character of its moral and religious teaching and the light which it throws upon the origin and character of the best religion the world has yet known, we cherish a reverence for it which we cherish for no other book and we give to it a place in our affection which no other book can occupy. Interpreted as the infallible word of God, there is no book which can so fetter the intellect and retard the moral and spiritual development of the race. Interpreted as the fallible utterance of men, it is still profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.

**And as he was praying the fashion of his countenance was altered and his raiment became white and dazzling.**

*Luke IX, 29.*

## PRAYER

ONE cannot read the story of Jesus without realizing the strength of the moral and spiritual impulse which he brought into the world. One cannot analyze his personality without gaining a new insight into the secret of his power. His was primarily a life of prayer. The closer he came into contact with men, the more frequently he sought to enter into communion with God. The more strenuous the demands made upon his time and strength, the more often he went apart to pray. It was during the quiet hours which he spent in the wilderness or upon the mount that he received the moral energy and spiritual power which enabled him to sway the multitudes. At such times he is said to have been so exalted that face and form were alike transfigured.

It is not surprising that this habit of Jesus should have made a profound impression upon his disciples. They were familiar with

the perfunctory prayers of temple and synagogue, and with the long petitions, stereotyped in form and empty of effect, by which religious zealots sought to draw attention to themselves upon the street corners, but here was a form of prayer which seemed to do something. It was capable of reviving one's flagging energies, strengthening his purpose and sending him back to his work with new courage and enthusiasm. Can we wonder that they desired to share the privilege? Or that, upon one occasion, they became sufficiently emboldened to exclaim, "Lord, teach us to pray."

The prayer which was given in response to this request has become a classic among liturgical utterances. Its simplicity, its atmosphere of trust, its unselfish spirit, all combine to give it a permanent place in the liturgies of the church. And yet it is doubtful if Jesus intended to establish a fixed form. He little thought that the words that he uttered would be repeated today as an almost universal petition among Christian people. He sought to give his disciples a model

which they might follow in formulating their own prayers. But the model proved to be so chaste and beautiful that it was treasured, almost word for word, by the disciples, preserved by two of the gospel writers, and remains today one of the most widely recognized bonds of Christian fellowship. Catholic and Protestant, orthodox and heterodox, can unite in this series of simple petitions addressed to their Father who is in Heaven.

Such an experience gives rise to the question, what is prayer? What is it that has given it its unique place in the religions of the world? Whatever differences we may recognize between them, all are one in their emphasis upon the importance of this habit. It must have a peculiar purpose in order to account for its peculiar power. Prayer may be defined as the response of the soul to its spiritual environment. It is the expression of a desire to come into touch with a Power higher and holier than ourselves. Every soul that is at all sensitive to spiritual realities becomes conscious sooner or later of great spiritual forces which surround us on

every hand and hold us continually in their embrace. We flatter ourselves that we are free, that we shape and control our own destinies, and we sing with enthusiasm,

> "I am the master of my fate,
> I am the captain of my soul."

In the last analysis, however, we are all creatures of destiny. The consciousness of our complete dependence upon God is the source of our power. "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves." In spite of our apparent freedom and self-direction, we know that above us and within us and around us there is a Power over which we have no control and which is constantly influencing our lives for either good or ill.

From time immemorial men have sought to come into conscious relationship with that power. They have sought to establish some kind of fellowship between themselves and their moral and spiritual environment. Being human and obliged to think in human terms, they have resorted to methods similar to those which they are accustomed to use in

communicating with one another. Sometimes the attempt has taken the form of spoken petition and adoration and in this way have grown up the great prayers of the ages, dating from specific periods and yet voicing the longings and aspirations of all time. At other times it has resorted to a sort of sign language, seeking to express itself in postures and gestures, in ritual and ceremonial. Occasionally it has ignored both of these methods and contented itself with silent communion or unspoken aspiration, with no attempt at outward expression. In each case, however, it has been prayer, and wherever it has proceeded from a sincere motive, an earnest desire to bring the finite soul into touch with the great Over-soul, it has been true prayer.

Scarcely less conspicuous than the naturalness and universality of these attempts to establish conscious relationship with some higher power has been their diversity. The attempts have been high or low, worthy or unworthy, according to one's conception of the nature of this higher power. Men have

prayed to sticks and stones regarded as fetishes or fashioned into idols. They have prayed to the sun and moon and stars and to almost every object of nature. They have prayed to animals and to other men as well as to the spirits of departed ancestors and to the multitudinous variety of gods. They have looked beyond these objects of worship to the power which was manifest in and through them and have sought to come into right relations with that power. It is a far cry from the savage praying to his war-god to give him victory over his enemies to the publican in the temple praying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," or to the psalmist crying, "Lord, create in me a clean heart and renew within me a right spirit." The gulf is even wider between the imprecatory psalms of the Old Testament and Jesus' prayer in the New, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And yet these represent varying stages in the evolution of the attempt to give expression to one of the most fundamental instincts of the human soul.

## PRAYER

The most casual observer must be aware that there has been a decline in the habit of prayer. There are many things which have contributed to this decline. The larger thought of God has led many to shrink from making any personal demands upon his favor. The belief in law as unfailing and immutable has made many of the ancient petitions obsolete. Why agonize in spirit if we cannot hope that, for us, aught of good or ill may be diverted from its appointed path? Why wrestle with the Almighty if he is unable to alter the workings of a single law that he has ordained? Furthermore the dread of all pious pretense and an instinctive feeling of delicacy have made it increasingly difficult for men to expose the spiritual workings of their souls to the gaze of the unsympathetic and even scornful as was the custom among the participants in the old-fashioned prayer meeting. To this may be added the fact that the restlessness and fever of our modern way of living tend to diminish the opportunity for a quiet hour in which to commune with the Father in spirit and in

truth. And yet it would be a mistake to call this a prayerless age. It is not that men do not pray but that they do not find it as easy to give outward expression to their prayers. The ease and naturalness with which some great emergency brings an involuntary prayer to the lips, so that men pray who never prayed before, proves how close to the surface the prayerful mood lies.

Thus the present decline in the habit of prayer is largely a decline in outward expression. The prayerful mood remains but we know not how to pray as we ought. Public prayer, as it prevails in our churches and at certain public functions, has been safeguarded by tradition and custom, but not so private prayer. It is a fair question how long public prayer can survive if the habit of private prayer is abandoned. We speak of common prayer, but prayer is not common unless it voices the aspirations and longings of those who are present and awakens a response in their hearts. Public prayer is not a performance to be watched or heard; it is an experience to be shared. And how can it

be shared unless all are in the prayerful mood? Without a certain degree of preparedness common prayer becomes an impossibility. The mind is occupied with irrelevant matters. It lacks that perfect abandon which is a prerequisite. One purpose of what has come to be called the introductory service is to induce the prayerful mood. We have made the mistake of thinking of it as introductory to the sermon. It is not. It is introductory to the prayer. Organ prelude, anthem, hymn, scripture reading, all have a common aim, to bring about this spiritual preparedness without which common prayer becomes a misnomer. They have their natural climax in the words, "Let us pray." The impression that some churches are more reverential than others is due in no small degree to the fact that in them the people come in promptly, sit down quietly, and join in a common service of worship; while in others the people straggle in one by one, and thoughtlessly interrupt the devotions of others by nodding to one another or whispering or indulging in equally

reprehensible forms of social intercourse. It may be that none of these constitutes religion; but they create the atmosphere which is favorable to the prayerful mood and consequently to the religious life.

Now the remedy for unpreparedness is preparedness. The best way to attain the prayerful mood on Sunday is to accustom oneself to it on other days of the week. We speak of God as the gracious giver of every good and perfect gift. Should we allow one day to go by without acknowledging our indebtedness? The soul that does not devote a portion of each day to communion with the things of the spirit will find it increasingly difficult to put itself into an attitude of communion on Sunday. The occasional prayer, the instinctive turning to God at the great crises of life, can never be wholly abandoned. But what of the institution of family worship? Nothing has been invented which has done more to lift men into the atmosphere of the spirit and to give them an intimate sense of the presence and the power of God than this one institution. The

elaborate morning prayers of a generation or more ago have gone beyond recall. But the increasing number of families in which the custom is to begin the day by reading some appropriate passage of scripture or some inspiring bit of verse and then uniting in the Lord's prayer is proof that the institution of family worship is based upon the recognition of a spiritual need which the occasional public prayer cannot satisfy. It not only serves to pitch the life of each new day at its proper level, but it affords an opportunity for simple, unostentatious religious expression and so ministers to soul growth. Thus to be helpful, prayer must be habitual. To receive the greatest benefit from public prayer, one must accustom oneself to private prayer. It may be the repetition of some familiar petition around the family altar, or the quiet talk with God in the seclusion of one's own closet, but in either case it reënforces the conviction that we are not pilgrims or strangers but children of the household of God.

And now what of the answer to prayer?

If we remember that the primary object of prayer is not petition but communion we shall not be seriously concerned about the answer. Some prayers ought not to be answered. To attempt to dictate the blessings which God shall bestow, is impiety. To pray that for us the laws of the universe may be set aside, is impertinence. To ask for the things we think we ought to ask for rather than for the things we really desire and for the attainment of which we are exerting every effort, is hypocrisy. To ask for specific blessings and then refrain from all personal endeavor, trusting that the Lord will provide, is mockery. Such prayers are never answered. But when we make our prayer the vehicle for expressing our highest aspirations and desires, and then add to our prayer earnest and consecrated effort, it must bring results. The answer may not be the one for which we looked. Our prayer may be answered in a larger sense than we had dreamed. Moses prayed that he might enter the land of promise. Instead he was given the power to relinquish his work into

other hands confident that in the end God's purposes would be fulfilled. Jesus prayed that the cup might pass from him. Instead he was given the strength to drain it to the dregs and to say, "Thy will, not mine, be done."

Such prayer can never pass away. In its lowest and simplest form it will always remain petition, asking for the things we most desire and yet knowing all the while that God will grant only such blessings as are most expedient for us. In another and higher form it will become aspiration and meditation, the yearning for a higher life and the desire that we may be given the strength to live it. But in its last and highest form prayer will always be communion, the blending of the human and the divine, the complete identification of our wills with the will of God, the consciousness that we are standing in his presence and that our souls are "in tune with the infinite." Such prayer is its own answer and its own sufficient reward.

# WHO ARE THE UNITARIANS?

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of; wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain
If, knowing God, they lift not hands in prayer?"

**God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved.**

*John III, 17.*

## SALVATION

A FEW years ago the editor of the *Hibbert Journal* sought to indicate the probable effects of the great war upon religion. He stated that there had always been two rival systems of theology, based upon two diverse interpretations of the world and of human life. Wherever the world has been regarded as evil and human life unworthy, religion has expressed itself as a longing for salvation, a yearning on the part of the individual for redemption from the world and from self. Wherever the world has been regarded as good and human life a boon, religion has expressed itself as an effort after moral excellence, an attempt on the part of the individual to play his part in the world and to make some worth while contribution to it. Dr. Jacks predicted that which of these two theories should be more popular after the war would depend upon how the human mind should react in the

presence of this world catastrophe. If it leads men to despair of the world and of human civilization, then the religion of salvation will receive an enormous impetus. But if it strengthens the conviction that present evil may result in ultimate good, that God will yet make the wrath of man to praise him while the remainder of wrath he will restrain, then the outlook for the religion of moral excellence will be most encouraging.

The war is ended, and yet the same uncertainty prevails today. It is too early to say whether the war has resulted in the strengthening of the claims of the old theology or in the renewal of the demand for a more liberal and a more rational interpretation of religion. Unitarians, however, continue to identify themselves with the religion of moral excellence. They still dare to have faith in a good God and in a good world and in the progress of mankind upward and onward forever, and this faith determines their attitude toward the traditional doctrine of salvation. It dictates their conception of the life from which they wish to be saved and

the life into which they wish to be delivered.

The problem of salvation cannot be dissociated from that of human sinfulness. Nowhere does the old theology differ more radically from the new. In one, sin is an inheritance from the past; in the other it is an achievement of the present. One bases it upon the ancient doctrine of imputed righteousness and imputed guilt; the other upon the modern conception of human freedom and responsibility. According to one, men are sinners because of another's transgression and they can be saved only by another's righteousness; according to the other, it is one's own act which determines the nature of his offense and the measure of his responsibility. And as these two theories differ in their conception of sin, so also they differ in their interpretation of the nature of punishment. With one, it involves endless suffering in an eternal hell, a punishment which is purely vindictive in character; with the other, it involves the cumulative effect of the penalties which every breach of the moral law brings in its wake, penalties which

are wholly remedial. Endless punishment would defeat its own purpose. It would make forever impossible the reclamation of the sinner. It would signify that finite human creatures could revolt against the infinite God and continue that revolt throughout eternity in spite of the restraints of Almighty Power and the constraints of Almighty Love. Thus the traditional hell would be a perpetual monument to a defeated God. It would be destructive of all religious faith. As long as men remain imperfect, they will continue to sin, each sin will bring its inevitable penalty, and these penalties will increase in intensity until, through their cumulative effect, every human soul is brought into right relations with God. It may take a year or it may take a millennium, but its goal is assured. A good God cannot will that any of his children shall perish. If he wills that all shall have everlasting life, then he will find some way to accomplish his purpose. Otherwise he is not infinite. He is not God. To those who affirm that such a conception of sin and its

punishment cuts the nerve of all moral endeavor, and that "if you destroy the fear of hell in the minds of men you will create a hell on earth," it can be rejoined that just in proportion as the world has grown morally better, belief in a literal hell has declined. The finest types of human character are found among those who have long since abandoned this archaic belief. It is doubtful if any human being has ever been kept back from presumptuous sin by the picture of a lurid hell at the end of every sinner's life. Our prisons and reformatories are filled with those who have had the advantage of whatever deterrent effect the traditional doctrine may have been able to exert.

It is against the background of human sinfulness that we must formulate our conception of salvation. Its fundamental meaning may be determined by considering the derivation of the word. It comes from the Latin "salvus," which means wholeness, or health. The saved life is the whole life, the life that is characterized by moral sanity and spiritual health. Because of this, every saved

man becomes a saviour, one who saves others. If he does not become such a saviour, he needs to beware lest he himself come short of salvation.

"Heaven's gates are shut to him who comes alone;
Save thou a soul, and it shall save thine own."

Such a conception is the polar opposite of the traditional interpretation. According to that, there has never been but one saviour. To Jesus, and to him alone, this title can be applied. And the salvation which he wrought was determined by the traditional conception of human needs. The first man was created not only innocent, but perfect. He was placed in a beautiful garden and provided with everything which he might need for his enjoyment or his use. There he might have remained had he not disobeyed the divine command. Through that primal act of disobedience he not only fell from grace, and lost the consciousness of the divine approval, but he made it possible for sin and death to enter the world and become a part of the inheritance of the race. The

function of Jesus, according to the traditional scheme of salvation, is to save men from this inherited guilt. The church has sanctioned many different explanations of how this salvation is to be accomplished, but that Jesus' death upon the cross atoned for human sinfulness and made possible the forgiveness of God is fundamental to them all. For more than twelve centuries the great question among Christian people was "What shall I do to be saved?" And the answer was "Submit yourself to the authority of the church. It alone possesses the kingdom of Heaven and therefore it alone can assure one of salvation." Thus the world was regarded as a doomed vessel, the church was a sort of life raft moored alongside, and the cry that went up from Christian leaders was *"Sauve qui peut."* The situation was not even relieved by the rule of "Women and children first." Men forgot their duty to their fellows in their mad desire to achieve safety for themselves.

The Protestant reformation destroyed the Roman monopoly of the straight gate and

the narrow way by providing other gates and other ways but they were equally straight and equally narrow. In place of the Roman Catholic submission to ecclesiastical authority as the sole condition of salvation, it promulgated a variety of conditions. With Luther it was justification by faith; with Calvin, election and foreordination; with Arminius, the abounding grace of God. And all of these, Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism and Arminianism, claimed to be founded upon the teachings of one whose constant solicitude was not how he might save himself but how he might serve others, not how he might get to heaven bye and bye, but how he could hasten the coming of the kingdom of Heaven here and now. Can we wonder that men came to distrust this whole scheme of salvation as an insult to God and an outrage upon humanity? They asked,

"Is selfishness,—for time a sin,—
Stretched out unto eternity, celestial prudence?"

Only in a self-centred world, one in which everything is ordered with special reference

to human needs and desires, could the traditional view of salvation find a congenial atmosphere. In a world which is God-centred it cannot long endure. Unitarians believe that instead of falling to our present state from a higher level of innocence and perfection, humanity has been slowly rising through countless ages of evolution and development. The process is still far from complete. With the advance in knowledge and the consequent quickening of our ethical perception, we can no longer regard personal salvation as the ultimate goal of human endeavor. We are less concerned about our destiny in another world than about our duties in this. And there is a growing conviction among all thinking people that if we will but attend to the duties, God will provide the destiny. If we can make our lives of service to the world, he will arrange for their ultimate preservation. For us the question is not "How shall I be saved?" but "How can I make myself worth saving?" And the answer is, only by a life of love and service.

And what is the chief obstacle to this life of service? It is our inherent selfishness. This is the primal source of almost all of the sins of humanity, the spirit which leads us to magnify self and to seek our own rather than our neighbor's good. It is a spirit which is as old as humanity. It has given us a self-centred universe, a self-centred theology, and a self-centred interpretation of life and duty. And it is from this that we must seek salvation. Not from the penalties for our sins, for these are remedial in nature and salutary in effect, but from sin itself and its root-source, selfishness. And it is for this that we look to Jesus. He has pointed out the way of escape. "Whosoever would save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever would lose his life for my sake, shall find it." The effort after personal salvation defeats itself. It is inherently selfish and selfishness can never be the centre of the religious life. As Whittier has said: "Hope not the cure of sin till self is dead." It is only by renouncing the life of self that the higher life is found. It is only by "forget-

ting it in love's service." The great war taught us that there are ideal values for which men will sacrifice their comfort and ease and even life itself. To save one's life from all hardship and discomfort and privation is to lose everything that makes it worth living; while to lose one's life in the service of some great and worthy cause is to find it again in ever greater abundance.

Thus we continue to look to Jesus as a world-saviour. He saves men, not by his death, but by his life. When asked that the chief places in the kingdom might be reserved for two of his disciples, he replied that it was not in his power to grant such a request. These places were for those for whom they had been prepared from the foundation of the world, those who had demonstrated their fitness for them by long and faithful service. There was to be no spoils system, no favoritism, in the kingdom of God. This lesson was not lost upon the disciples. With them, also, service, good works, brotherly love, Christian kindness, became the characteristics of the followers

of Jesus. The New Testament knows nothing of any faith which is not born of love and attested by good works. When Paul's disciples sought to pervert his teachings and asserted that one could be saved by faith independent of good works, St. James rebuked them with this challenge: "Show me thy faith apart from thy works and I, by my works, will show thee my faith." For "faith without works is dead." A saving faith is not the acceptance of a body of opinions about God and Christ and their relations to one another and to the world; it is an attitude of confidence and love and trust toward God as the great all-father and toward Jesus as the supreme revealer of that God to men. To those who share this faith religion is no longer a means of personal salvation; it is a means of social service. The church is no longer an ark of safety; it is an institution through which we seek to organize the life of God as it manifests itself in the souls of men and to enlist it in the service of the world. Under such conditions the desire for salvation becomes at once

honest and honorable. The means may be personal, but the motive and the end are both alike social. It is deliverance from the sin of selfishness and from all that would deaden the conscience or pervert the will. Such deliverance is not achieved through faith but through character. It is not purchased for us by another's death; it is something which we must work out for ourselves, always with fear and trembling lest we prove insufficient for the task, and yet always with the assurance that in every effort to make our lives of service to the world, it is God who works in us both to will and to do his good pleasure.

**Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.**

*1 Corinthians II, 9.*

## THE FUTURE LIFE

ONE of the most absorbing questions which have baffled and perplexed the human mind throughout the ages has been as to the nature of that life eternal which has been the substance of the hopes and dreams of devout men and women. What is the secret of the life immortal? How shall we solve the mystery which awaits us there beyond death? Unfortunately, some of our most cherished beliefs are incapable of either proof or disproof. We are obliged to content ourselves with a reasonable probability. Such is our faith in a future life. As Tennyson has said:

> "Thou canst not prove that thou art immortal, no,
> Nor yet that thou art mortal—
> For nothing worth proving can be proven,
> Nor yet disproven."

The Unitarian belief in immortality is simply the inevitable corollary of their con-

ception of life itself. If life is eternally progressive, progress upwards and onwards forever, then death must be but an incident in that endlessly progressive life.

There are two things which are impressed upon us whenever we attempt to solve the mystery which lies beyond the grave. One is the recognition of the insuperable obstacles by which every such attempt is beset. For centuries men have sought to peer within the veil. And with what result? The scenes and events of the life immortal remain shrouded in impenetrable mystery. No-one has yet returned from that mysterious realm to gratify our curiosity. Communications which purport to come from the friends that have gone before, although vouched for by Sir Oliver Lodge and others, are couched in the language of today and tell us little that is not already present in our own or another's consciousness. It cannot be affirmed that such communications are impossible. No human being is sufficiently well informed to make such an assertion. What we can say is that thus far these alleged communications

have been singularly disappointing. May it not be that there is infinite wisdom underlying this apparent inscrutability of the beyond? May it not be a beneficent uncertainty? If it were possible to make voyages of discovery into that other world and to chart its mysteries, could we bear to do anything else? If we knew that we could enter into communication with the friends who have gone before, should we not be forever besieging the portals of that other world for such communications? And would this not lead to the utter abandonment of the interests and activities of the life that now is? One cannot escape the conviction that if God had intended that we should know the details of that life he would have made it easier for them to be ascertained. If he has not made it easier for us, may it not be because he does not wish to have the interests of this life overshadowed by the distractions of the next? We must live our lives "One world at a time." "Otherwise," as Kant has said, "God and eternity, with their infinite majesty, would stand cease-

lessly before our eyes." We could think of nothing else. It may be that the beneficence of this present life is attested by what is denied quite as much as by what is given.

A second impression made upon us by the attempts to fathom the secrets of that other life is that the reality must surpass anything that the mind can formulate or the imagination conceive. In the words of Isaiah, which have their echo in St. Paul, "Since the beginning of the world, men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen,—what God hath prepared for him that waiteth upon him." How pathetic have been the attempts of devout men to behold the invisible and to portray the indescribable. The Indian with his happy hunting ground, the Goth with his Valhalla of feasting and fighting, the Oriental with his dream of annihilation or absorption and the Christian with his vision of a city with walls of jasper, gates of pearl and streets of gold, all attest the inability of the human imagination to grasp the reality of that other life. We look up from these various pictures, with their

material crudity and spiritual poverty, with the conviction that that life must be infinitely grander than this or God's work has resulted in an anti-climax. In the words of Sir Oliver Lodge: "I will not believe that it is given to man to have thoughts nobler or loftier than the real truth of things."

Let us turn from the vision to the reality. If, as we believe, all worlds are God's worlds and all life is one, then we must be already living the eternal life. As Dr. Fosdick has said, "If man is immortal at all, he is immortal now." Eternal life is not a possession conferred at death; it is a present endowment. This is the conviction which is gradually taking possession of the minds of thinking people. They are giving less thought to what is to become of them after death and more to what is happening to them here and now. What kind of a life are we actually living today? What sort of characters are we forming in the midst of our daily activities? Are we living so as to make it worth while for God to permit us to live forever? If so, can we doubt that he

will make it possible for us to live forever? These are the questions which men are pondering even though they may shrink from giving expression to their hopes and fears. What they are not always conscious of is that this comes nearer to the thought of Jesus than much that has passed as the teaching of the church. When the young man came to him and asked, "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" he was not contemplating impending death. He was never more alive. And when Jesus answered, "If thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments," he also was thinking of life, not death. To him, entering upon life was synonymous with life eternal. It was something that could be experienced here and now, not something for which we must wait until we have shuffled off this mortal coil. According to Jesus, until one becomes conscious of the eternal character of this present life, he has not begun to live. "He that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me hath (already) everlasting life." Only through this faith in the end-

less character of the life we are now living can we claim the victory over death and the grave.

Such a faith is a matter of conviction rather than of proof. It is the result of actual experience rather than of logical deduction. One might prove that life survives death without proving that it is eternal. It might survive for a time and then fade away. One might prove that the human soul is indestructible without proving that the consciousness of personal identity will be preserved. The soul may be reabsorbed into the source whence it came. One might prove that Jesus arose from the dead and ascended bodily into heaven without proving that a similar destiny awaits mankind. Such an experience would mark him as a unique personality, and as such he would naturally experience a unique destiny. But one cannot demonstrate the real quality of the life that we are living without proving its eternal character. The disciples became conscious of the power of the endless life in Jesus and they refused to believe that

death could have dominion over him. It is the consciousness of this same deathless quality in the lives of those we know best and love most which assures us that, for them also, death cannot be the end. But if for them, why not for all? For death

> "Can only take away the mortal breath;
> And life, commencing here,
> Is but the prelude to its full career."

If we would assure ourselves of the power of this faith, we must observe its effects upon the lives of those who have cherished it. Their name is legion, for it has been the inspiration of the saints and martyrs of every age and race. Nowhere do we find it more clearly exhibited than in the life of the great apostle. Although he was not one of the original disciples and had been deprived of the privilege of walking with Jesus and talking with him during his brief ministry, he came nearer to his thought than any of the chosen twelve. Furthermore his letters were written prior to the earliest of the gospel narratives and therefore before the myths

and legends which came to be associated with Jesus had gained wide acceptance. He knew nothing of the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection, and yet for him Jesus was not dead, but alive forevermore. There is no New Testament writer whose testimony is given more emphatically or more consistently in favor of this power of the endless life.

The first effect of this faith was to make St. Paul utterly indifferent to all earthly vicissitudes. As long as he could carry on the work to which he had dedicated himself, he cared nothing about the persecution and suffering to which he was subjected. They were evidence that he had been permitted to share the tribulations of the Master and might expect, therefore, to share his glory. He might suffer, but he must not sin. He might be beaten and imprisoned and endure all manner of evil, but he must not renounce the cause of Christ and so crucify him afresh. For, as he wrote to the Roman church, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life."

A second effect of this same faith was Paul's contempt for death and all its attendant evils. Writing to his friends in the Philippian church he states that it matters not to him whether he live or die, if so be Christ is magnified in his body, "for to live is Christ, to die is gain." To the Corinthians he writes: "For we are confident, willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." At times his attitude is that of mingled challenge and exultation as in the familiar cry, "O death, where is thy sting; O grave, where is thy victory?" Everywhere there is the same sublime disregard, fearing neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come, if only he remained obedient to the heavenly vision.

This faith, while conspicuous in the great apostle, was not peculiar to him. It has manifested its power in all ages. We witness the same heroic spirit asserting itself again and again during those terrible days when the church was prostrate under the heel of a Domitian or a Nero. There is something to be reckoned with in a faith which takes rich

and poor, master and slave, patrician and peasant, and transforms all alike into heroes and martyrs. They might renounce their property but they would not renounce their religion. They might be deprived of their liberty but they could not be deprived of their faith. They went into the arena with hymns of praise upon their lips. They were torn by wild beasts and mangled by scarcely less brutal gladiators, and yet they retained their faith that their affliction, which endured but for a moment, would work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Persecution might destroy the body; it could not destroy the soul. And when, at last, they should be absent from the body, they would be at home with their Lord.

If, at times, this faith seems wholly absent from the world of today, it is not because it has lost its power but because men have lost their grip upon it or abandoned it altogether. Those who heed the apostolic injunction and lay hold upon life eternal find that it has lost none of its old-time efficacy. Make it a this world reality, not a next world expec-

tation, and all fear of death will be swallowed up in the consciousness of life. Such a faith does not bid us court death, but live each day as though we knew that we were to live forever. It does not bid us renounce our worldly possessions, but use them as means to the attainment of a higher life. It does not bid us go into the arena and fight with beasts in order to prove our faith, but it bids us take our stand as immortal souls in the midst of the arena of life and to wage an eternal warfare against everything that would drag us down to the brute level. Without this faith, we might regard this earthly life as a sort of pleasure trip, prolonged for twenty or forty or seventy years, after which we go hence to be no more. Under such conditions it would be the part of wisdom to crowd it with creature comforts and bodily satisfactions. We should eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. But sustained and strengthened by this faith, believing that we are not pilgrims or strangers but children of the household of God, life becomes real and earnest and the grave is no

longer the goal. We experience a complete transvaluation of values. We realize that wealth and power are temporal; they will be left behind. Character is eternal; it alone endures. Creature comforts are fleeting and transitory; they will pass away. The things of the spirit are permanent; they can never fade. Even death itself is temporal. It is simply a door, opening into another and larger room in the father's house, and life becomes richer and more beautiful as we journey through the many mansions which he hath prepared for those that love him.

This has been well called "practicing immortality." Those who have learned to live their lives amid the seen and the temporal in the spirit of one whose soul has been touched by the unseen and the eternal, find that this faith has lost none of its power. It is capable of transforming the lives of men today just as it transformed the lives of Jesus and Paul and the holy men of old. Working day by day in the light of an endless life, we become builders for eternity. The apparent loss of spiritual energy, the

seeming discrepancy between the world's effort and its actual achievement, the manifest disparity between virtue and happiness, or wickedness and misery, the blasted hopes, the disappointed ambitions, the shattered affections, all of which are so apparent whenever we attempt to view this life as an end in itself, disappear at once when we learn to view it as part of a larger whole. In that larger life the lost spiritual power is regained, the world processes come to an adequate fruition, the justice of the world is vindicated and the broken arcs of our little lives come to their perfect round. As Browning says:

> "All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist,
> Not its semblance, but itself—
> When eternity affirms the conception of an hour."

It requires no argument to prove that a life lived in this way, "under the aspect of eternity," cannot fail to give satisfaction. In the words of Aristotle: "Live as nearly as you can the immortal life and it will prove

itself. Live the kind of life you ought to live if you are to live forever and all your doubts will disappear." Live it for a single day and it will be abundantly worth while. Live it for any number of days and it will bring with it a strength of character, a moral courage, a spiritual peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

## CONCLUSION

### ARE UNITARIANS EVANGELICAL?

THE question with which we began—Who are the Unitarians?—is now answered. We have considered their origin, their history and their beliefs. It has been demonstrated that a creedless church is not necessarily a faithless church. It could be demonstrated just as easily that this free faith has ever articulated itself in terms of upright life and noble character. Call the roll of the good and the great among the men and women of America and one will be surprised to find how many of them have belonged to the Unitarian church. A church which has numbered among its adherents William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Edward Everett Hale, and which still counts among its most devoted members Charles W. Eliot and William Howard Taft cannot be ignored. Its constituency must be weighed rather than counted. We can say without boasting, for

it is admitted by those who love us least, that nowhere in any community can one find a group of men and women more renowned for breadth of mind, strength of will and integrity of character, than those who have associated themselves together for the purpose of organizing a Unitarian church.

For more than a century it has been the privilege of these churches to mediate between an unintelligent faith and an irreligious culture. They have demonstrated that men can be religious without being superstitious and liberal without being irreverent. This has been a task for strong men, for self-reliant men, for men who have dared to do their own thinking and to abide by the consequences of their own thought. This may explain, even if it does not justify, what is often an occasion for concern among liberal Christians,—the relatively small number of liberal churches. It is lamented that it is not a popular faith, that it does not appeal to the multitudes. Since when has truth been determined by majorities or the right by popular vote? Ours is a pioneer move-

ment. Our mission has been to blaze the trail over which others now walk in perfect security. When we become popular we shall have ceased to be pioneers.

Scarcely less common among the misconceptions of Unitarianism is the statement that it is an easy faith. On the contrary it is the hardest of the hard. It dares to dispense with the helps upon which other churches place so much reliance. It is harder to think for oneself than to have one's thinking done by pope or presbyter or priest. It is harder to formulate one's own belief than to accept a creed formulated by synod or council or church. It is harder to determine for oneself what is right and then to do it at whatever cost than to conform to some external standard of conduct. And it is a thousandfold harder to face the inevitable and unescapable penalties for wrong-doing than to have those penalties remitted through faith in the atoning death of an innocent man. It is this reliance of the individual upon himself, upon his own reason and conscience and will, that makes the Unitarian faith so diffi-

cult to accept and to live up to, and yet it is this self-reliance which makes it abundantly worth while.

But is such a faith evangelical? This is the question asked by those who are responsible for the policy of exclusion in religion and answered in the negative. Our answer will depend upon what we mean by evangelical. It may mean a message which is literally "good news," or one which is in accord with the teachings of Jesus as contained in the gospel narratives.

We know how the traditional scheme of salvation, with its wretched story of sin and failure and defeat, fares when subjected to this twofold test. Is it good news? Can one who hears the story for the first time accept it as glad tidings of great joy? Is it not rather a gospel of despair? Again, is it in accord with the teachings of Jesus? On the contrary it is in direct opposition to those teachings. If Jesus were here today and were to be judged by his teachings as recorded in the four gospels, he would not be eligible to sit in the councils of the so-called evangelical churches.

## WHO ARE THE UNITARIANS?

How is it with the Unitarian message as outlined in these pages,—God our Father, man our brother, Jesus our moral and spiritual leader, human life a progress in that Christlikeness of character which is salvation, and human destiny that same progress continued upward and onward forever? If we take the word literally, it is certainly evangelical, for it has brought glad tidings of great joy to men in all ages and the world over. If we take the derived meaning as implying conformity to the teachings of Jesus, it is also evangelical, for it is more than conformity; it is practical identity. It is a fair question whether the Unitarian church, (and its sister church, the Universalist) is not the only church which has a right to call itself evangelical; for it is the only church which has dared to preserve in all its simple beauty the evangel which Jesus proclaimed in far-off Galilee,—the good tidings of the coming of the kingdom of God, and of man's fitness for citizenship therein. We are not ashamed of this gospel of Christ, and by our fidelity to it we are willing to be judged.

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